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RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE 1180

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TALLINN 000297

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/03/2017

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON BRONZE SOLDIER AND ESTONIAN-RUSSIAN  
RELATIONS

REF: A. TALLINN 290

[1](#)B. MOSCOW 1998

Classified By: DCM Jeff Goldstein for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Following days of demonstrations outside the Estonian Embassy in Moscow and an attack on their Ambassador, the GOE pushed hard for EU engagement with Moscow. The resulting Troika demarche in Moscow and statement by the Presidency was well-received by the GOE. A Russian State Railways announcement that it will suspend oil shipments for "previously unpublicized scheduled maintenance" has generated only muted response from Estonia. Meanwhile, the Bronze Soldier has been placed in the military cemetery in Tallinn and is being attended by a steady stream of thus far peaceful visitors. End Summary.

The GOE Calls for EU Engagement with Russia

[1](#)2. (C) Following several days of demonstrations in front of their Embassy in Moscow and a May 2 attack on Estonia's Ambassador to Russia (reftels), the GOE condemned the GOR's violation of the Vienna Convention and stepped up its calls for EU engagement with Russia. In an address to the parliament on May 2, PM Ansip said that Estonia has asked the EU for "immediate action" because an attack on one member state "means an attack against the entire EU." In an official statement, President Ilves highlighted the need for unity among all Estonians and "civility" from Russia. Privately, during a (previously scheduled) lunch with EU Ambassadors in Tallinn, Ilves said he doesn't want any more "even-handed" statements, that it is time for the "EU to take a side." In a statement released May 1, FM Paet outlined accusations of Russian Embassy representatives meeting with riot organizers, blamed the Russian Federation for cyber attacks against GOE websites, and accused Russian news organizations of broadcasting false stories including Estonian police killing detainees and Estonian Defense Forces Members ordering its members to shoot Russians. Paet emphasized that the GOE believes it is "essential that the European Union react in full strength against the behavior of Russia," and suggested that this could mean suspension of EU-Russia negotiations and postponement of the EU-Russia Summit.

[1](#)3. (C) Kyllike Sillaste-Elling, the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Advisor, emphasized to us how important the GOE felt it was for the EU to recognize the seriousness of the situation for Estonia. In addition to the myriad of public statements on May 2, the GOE continued to direct diplomatic

outreach to the EU -- with calls by PM Ansip to President Merkel, FM Paet to the German FM, and statements in COREPER. Sillaste-Elling said the GOE is satisfied with the EU's response to Estonia's "coordinated approach," noting the Troika's demarche in Moscow and the EU Presidency Statement issued on May 2. She also stressed that the issue is much bigger than the Bronze Soldier or the security of Estonia's Embassy in Moscow. Estonia has been under an "incredible amount of pressure from Russia," Sillaste-Elling said, and Russia has a direct desire to influence internal Estonian politics. She said that unless the countries and organizations that Russia cares about say something, Russia will not stop.

#### Duma Delegation and Curiously Timed Railway Maintenance

¶4. (SBU) On May 2, the MFA briefed members of the diplomatic community on the April 30-May 1 visit of a Russian Duma delegation. MFA Director General for Non-EU Europe, Simmu Tiik, said the GOE invited the delegation after PM Ansip's phone conversation with German Chancellor Merkel on April 27, despite GOE reservations about the delegation's motivations. These suspicions were confirmed, according to Tiik, when the head of the Russian delegation, Nikolay Kovalev, told the press before leaving Moscow that his main purpose was to demand the resignation of the Estonian Government. In Tallinn, the Russian parliamentarians continued to make this demand at every meeting and then refused to attend a scheduled press/diplomatic corps briefing at the MFA. The GOE responded by downgrading ministerial-level meetings to Ministry Chancellors (DepSec equivalents). Tiik emphasized that the GOE had hoped to use the visit to convey its views of the situation, but made clear that there was little

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progress in this direction. For example, when the Russian delegation asked for access to the site where the Bronze Soldier exhumations are currently taking place, the Estonians explained that the Russian Embassy had turned down the GOE's earlier request that it send a consular representative to the site. Tiik noted that the GOE did not think it appropriate for politicians -- Estonian or Russian -- to visit the site while exhumations are ongoing. The Russian delegation reportedly said they understood, but then went on to tell the Russian press that the GOE's refusal to provide access to the site was "horrible, a sacrilege."

#### Economic Threats. . .but GOE Remains Optimistic

¶5. (C) According to press reports, the Russian state railway monopoly announced planned maintenance of the route that carries Russian refined oil product exports to Estonia starting May 1. However, Andro Moldre, Deputy Director of the Energy Department at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, told us that so far he is not aware of any disruption in oil transit shipments from Russia. He added that Estonia has accumulated approximately one-half of a 90-day strategic petroleum reserve, per EU mandates, but as yet the GOE has no plans to use this. On the domestic consumption side, Moldre said Estonians will not be hurt at the pump in the event of a stoppage of oil transit, because retailers get most of the petrol from the Maziaku refinery in Lithuania, Neste Oil in Finland, and other (non-Russian) suppliers. Urmas Glaase, Press Spokesman for the Estonian State Railways (EVR), also confirmed to us that as of noon on May 3, there have been no disruptions reported to oil transport shipments through Estonia from Russia, and "EVR's business is operating as usual." Glaase noted that he had just spoken with his counterpart at Russian Railways, who did not indicate any plans to disrupt service.

#### Most Politicians Rally Behind the Government

¶6. (SBU) With the exception of the Center Party, all other political parties -- even those that had previously not supported plans to relocate the Bronze Soldier -- are now

rallying behind the government. In a meeting with Poloff, Randel Lants of the Social Democrats and Mark Strandberg of the opposition Green Party stated that both parties are in favor of a tough and united response to Russia's actions and propaganda campaign. According to both Lants and Strandberg the Duma delegation's visit has only inflamed domestic political opinion. Alexander Lohtman, another Green Party MP, observed that the delegation visit harkens back to the Soviet delegation in the late 1930's that demanded the resignation of the Estonian government and promptly annexed the country.

17. (SBU) Center Party leader and Tallinn Mayor Edgar Savisaar has been vocally criticizing GOE actions, while rejecting accusations that his own statements undermine the stability of the state. In a public statement, Savisaar said "we live in an Estonia different from what it was few days ago," and that "we have to get out of the war started by Ansip." An editorial in Postimees, Estonia's paper of record, criticized Savisaar for using the crisis to try to bolster his popularity. There has been a strong popular backlash against Savisaar. A group calling itself the "Estonian National Movement" has collected over 82,000 signatures requesting that Savisaar step down. (Note: There is currently no legal mechanism for a petition of this sort to have anyQct. End Note.)

The Bronze Soldier: Still in One Piece

18. (SBU) On May 1, the GOE place the Bronze Soldier in its new location in a TalQmilitary cemetery and began allowing public access to the statue. Members of the mission visited the site and found the statue to be in good condition, in a respectful and dignified location, and surrounded by flowers and peaceful visitors. (Note: Russian press reported and the Duma deputies claimed, all incorrectly, that the statue had been cut into pieces. End Note.) Local police have a marked car and two uniformed officers stationed outside the cemetery. While the storefront windows of many Tallinn businesses remain broken and boarded up and police presence remains high, the incidences of property destruction and disorderly conduct

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have declined significantly. Police continue work to individually identify those who took place in the riots and prepare for a possible re-escalation of violence as May 9 approaches.

19. (SBU) The GOE recently announced two upcoming events related to the relocation of the statue. On May 8, as part of a commemoration of the victims of WWII, the GOE will invite the diplomatic corps to lay flowers at three sites: the Klooga Holocaust memorial, the Bronze Soldier, and the Marjamaa monument to Russian, German, and Estonian soldiers. The Ministers of Defense and Population will represent the GOE at these ceremonies. In June, an official ceremony will be planned to rebury the exhumed bodies and to unveil the Bronze Soldier at its new location. The Estonians indicate that they plan to invite not only local diplomats to the event, but also representatives from allied countries.  
PHILLIPS